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Sermon on the Gospel for the Second Sunday after Epiphany.

JOHN 2, 1—11.

Many years ago a minister of the Gospel was busy at his desk, when a young man entered into his study with the request that he perform the marriage ceremony for him. It was a careless, worldly-minded young fellow. Like so many others, he had been baptized and confirmed, but he had forgotten the solemn vows which he had made. He had gone with the world, and had found pleasure in the wicked ways of the world.

When this young wayward man handed his marriage license to the minister, the minister, opening the church record, turned to him and said, "My young friend, I see that your name has been recorded in this book before." "Indeed," said the young man, "it was recorded in the church record when I was baptized and confirmed." "True," said the pastor, "and now your name is written into this book for the third time, and, maybe, it will once more be written into this book—at your burial, perhaps. Now tell me, my young friend, do you suppose that you will find your name also written in God's Book of Life when you must appear before your God, before the just Judge of all?" These words spoken from a pastoral heart to a wayward young groom were not spoken in vain. By the grace of God they found their way to a penitent heart. The young man forsook the wicked ways of an ungodly, unbelieving world, and from that time to his death he in true faith served his Savior with a thankful heart.

My friends, our names are also written in the church record. Many of us had their names recorded in the church record for the third time already. God only knows how soon our names shall be written into the church record for the *last* time. To-morrow's sun may be unseen by us—we may be dead before the sun will show

his face again. To-day robust, to-morrow dust! Are our names written in the Book of Life? An important question! The Bible tells us that only the names of God's elect, *i. e.*, only the names of the true Christians, are written in the Book of Life. Whether our names are found in God's Book of Eternal Life depends upon the fact whether we be true Christians. Are we *true* Christians? Whether or not we are true Christians we may learn from to-day's Gospel-lesson. It tells us what we must do if we would be true Christians. By the help of the Holy Spirit, and in accordance with our Gospel-lesson, I shall now endeavor to answer the all-important question:—

WHAT MUST WE DO IF WE WOULD BE TRUE CHRISTIANS?

1. *We must believe what God has revealed unto us in His Gospel;*
2. *We must patiently and prayerfully bear the cross which God sends us for our spiritual welfare;*
3. *We must do what God in His Word tells us to do.*

1.

If we would be true Christians, most beloved friends, then, in the first place, we must believe what God has revealed unto us in His saving Gospel.

What is it that He has revealed unto us in His Gospel? It is this,—that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and the one and only Savior of sinners. We read in to-day's Gospel-lesson: "This beginning of miracles . . . believed on Him."

We know that the Jews had no right conception of the person and office of Jesus Christ, nor of the work He came to do. They believed Him to be merely the son of Mary and Joseph, the unlettered son of a carpenter at Nazareth, who, they thought, was beside himself. When, therefore, the first disciples of Jesus came to Nathanael, saying, "We have found Him . . . son of Joseph," Nathanael answered them, saying, "Can there any good thing . . . Thou art the King of Israel."

It is true, Jesus had manifested forth His glory in bygone days, *e. g.*, at His miraculous birth in that lowly stable in Bethlehem, and when, at the age of twelve, He went up to the city of Jerusalem to celebrate the feast of the passover. Being about His heavenly Father's business, He astonished the learned doctors by His profound questions and answers. But the Jews had forgotten those manifestations of His divine glory. Now, however, the time had come for Him to carry out the great work of redeeming a sinful, lost world, and therefore He wrought that great miracle at the wedding in Cana. A few weeks before He had been baptized by John the Baptist, and had been tempted by the devil in the wilderness of Judah after fasting forty days and forty nights. Immediately after His great victory over the devil, He had called His first disciples.

Shortly afterwards He performed that great miracle at Cana, "and manifested forth . . . believed on Him." His disciples were now fully convinced that He was not only the son of Mary, but also the eternal Son of God, the God-man Savior of a lost and condemned world.

Most people do not believe that Jesus of Nazareth, who "manifested forth His glory" at Cana, is the Son of God and the Savior of the world. The vast majority of men look upon Him as nothing more than a mere man. Of course, they laud Him highly as a perfect, a model man; they admire Him for His profound wisdom and knowledge; they praise Him as a fearless reformer, and magnify Him as a great teacher and preacher,—but that is all. They do not believe that He is the very Son of God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and sent by Him into our flesh and into this world to save all sinners from sin, death, and the power of the devil. In short, most people do not believe that Jesus Christ is the God-man Savior of sinners, who has won and purchased them from condemnation by His bitter sufferings and innocent death upon the cross.

But, my friends, what most people do not believe and do not want to believe God has revealed unto us in His holy Gospel. The Gospel is neither more nor less than the message of divine grace, that Jesus of Nazareth is the Savior of sinners, of *all* sinners. It is written of Him: "Behold the Lamb of God," etc., John 1, 29. "This is the true God, and eternal life." "God so loved the world," etc., John 3, 16. "All men should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father." "This is a faithful saying," etc., 1 Tim. 1, 15. Yea, there is hardly a chapter in the Bible that does not reveal unto us the Gospel truth that Jesus of Nazareth is the God-man Savior of this sinful and lost world.

What no philosophy of man ever had dreamt of, and what has ever been beyond the grasp of human understanding, God has revealed unto us in His Gospel, and we must believe it if we would be true Christians.

2.

If we would be true Christians, my most beloved friends, we must also patiently and prayerfully bear the cross which God in His wisdom sends us for our spiritual welfare. This fact I also wish to impress upon your soul.

Most people have very erroneous notions concerning the ways of God. They believe that a person should be free from the crosses, trials, and tribulations of this life as soon as he has become a true Christian. The Bible and also our Christian experience teach us that God's children "must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God." Jesus Himself has said: "If any man will come after me," etc., Matt. 16, 24. From to-day's Gospel-lesson it is evi-

dent that God's children, the Christians, are not always blessed with an overabundance in things temporal. The couple at Cana were Christians. Had they not been true Christians, they would not have invited Jesus, Jesus' mother, nor His disciples to their wedding. But from the account given in our Gospel-lesson it is evident that they were poor. The love they cherished toward their fellowmen had induced them to invite more guests than they could well take care of. We must also remember that the wedding festivities of the Orientals often lasted seven days. They had not enough wine, the evangelist tells us in our Gospel-lesson. It would be absurd to think that the bidden guests had indulged too freely in the consumption of the wine, and that for this reason the wine had given out. If such had been the case, Jesus, who pronounces His anathemas upon drunkenness and drunkards, would not have come to their rescue. The fact is that these people, being poor, had not been able to lay in a large supply of wine. The mother of Jesus, perhaps a distant relative of the young couple, noticing the shortage of wine, and knowing Jesus to have all power in heaven and on earth, said to Him, "They have no wine." She wanted to say unto Him, "You know this couple and their parents are poor. They did all that was within their power for their wedding guests, and it is an easy matter for you to help them, and I am persuaded that you will help. If you would not help them, the people of this town would say that you were unable to do so, and that you were not the almighty Son of God, and that you cared not for the welfare of your people." But what did Jesus say to His mother? He said, "Woman, . . . not yet come." What an answer! But His mother understood Him perfectly well, and with Christian patience she awaited His hour. She knew that He could help, and that He would help in His own good time.

My beloved Christian friends, as it was at Cana so it is even to this very day. Even to this day true Christians very often are in great need; they are in want of the very necessities of this life. Yea, it frequently happens that they do not know how they shall be fed and clothed, especially when they have but a meager income. And, besides, they very often must also contend with sicknesses of various kinds. And how often does it not occur that death enters into such a poor Christian family and takes away the father, the supporter of the mother and her children. And as true Christians are no mummies, they keenly feel the cross that so heavily lies upon them.

On the other hand, the unbelievers and worldlings very often fare well in the things that pertain to this temporal life. They often are blessed with an overabundance, and, besides, they are well and happy. Whilst true Christians must fast and bear a heavy cross, the worldlings fare sumptuously every day. Think of Dives, that

ungodly but rich man, and poor Lazarus, that sorely tried child of God!

But, my Christian friends, we Christians do not despair when trials, tribulations, and crosses become our lot. We know that it is God, our dear Father in heaven, who has seen fit to lay a heavy cross upon us. We know that He means well with us. We know that God wants to draw us closer to His heart of infinite love. Therefore we patiently and prayerfully bear the cross which God has sent us for our welfare. We know "that the sufferings of this present time," etc., Rom. 8, 18. "And God shall wipe away all tears," etc., Rev. 21, 4. "Beloved, 'It is well!'" etc. (Hymn 338, 1—4.)

3.

Finally, if we would be true Christians, we must also do what God tells us to do in His Word.

When Jesus did not immediately comply with the wish of His mother, she did not despair of His help. She firmly believed that He would help as soon as His hour had come, and therefore she said to the servants: "Whatsoever He saith unto you, do it!" She wanted them to understand that Jesus was the almighty Son of God, and that His ways and means are different from ours. Even if He should tell them to do things which, according to their human views, would seem absurd, they should do it, nevertheless. "Whatsoever," no matter what it may be, "He saith unto you, do it!" And they obeyed her. When a few moments later Jesus told them to fill the empty waterpots with water, "they filled them up to the brim." And when He said unto them: "Draw out now, and bear unto the governor of the feast," they did as He had told them to do. Since they had heard Mary they were resolved to do everything that Jesus, the Son of God, would tell them to do. They surely believed in Him. Truly, they were obedient servants of the Lord. Well done, good and faithful servants!

If we, beloved friends, would be true disciples and faithful servants of our Lord Jesus Christ, we must also do what He tells us to do.

Nowadays we often hear people say, "If you want to be a true Christian, do *as you think Jesus would do*. Recently a number of young people in Cleveland, O., resolved to live as Jesus would live—for *two weeks*. Poor deluded young people! To live as Jesus would for two weeks, or even a few weeks longer, does not make any one a disciple of Jesus. No, my friends, if we would be true Christians, we must not only do as we believe Jesus would do, but we must do what Jesus tells us to do in His Word, and, furthermore, we must not only serve Him for two weeks or two years, but we must serve Him unto our end. He says: "Be thou faithful unto death!"

There are many people who would be Christians, but they do

not want to do what God tells them to do. Of course, such people are not true Christians. True faith is always accompanied by good works. Faith without works is dead. True faith and a Christian life must go hand in hand. We must prove our faith in Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, by doing what He tells us to do, by a godly life. Jesus said: "Not every one," etc., Matt. 7, 21. And again: "Let your light so shine," etc., Matt. 5, 16.

My friends, all your church-going will avail you nothing if you will not do what God tells you to do in His Word. It is indeed true that the only way a sinner can be eternally saved is through faith in Jesus Christ, whose blood cleanseth from all sin, but it must be a *living* faith, for a dead faith cannot save. If you have true faith, you will also do what God tells you to do in His Word, you will lead a Christian life—not for two weeks, but unto your end.

Let us, then, not forget that if we would be true Christians, we must believe what God has revealed unto us in His saving Gospel; we must also patiently and prayerfully bear the cross which He sends us for our spiritual welfare, and we must do what He tells us to do in His Word. Amen.

J. H. H.

Sermon on the Gospel for Septuagesima Sunday.

MATT. 20, 1—16.

"The laborer is worthy of his hire," is a maxim set up by the Word of God itself. In this life, then, the rule applies, that the wages are to be in proportion to the work; everybody should receive the pay to which his work entitles him. And upon the whole, this is the case. The man who has spent a good portion of money and time in acquiring an education generally can earn more money than a person with a lesser degree of education. Again, a mechanic whose work requires greater skill and more patient application can earn higher wages than a common laborer, who can do no more than ordinary manual work. And it is right that this should be so. In earthly matters everybody should receive what his work is worth. There "the laborer is worthy of his hire." Would to God that this rule were always observed, that all employers were always willing to pay their laborers the wages they deserve, and that all workmen were satisfied with the wages they receive and earn. It is one of the greatest evils of our country that this is not the case. On the one hand, so many of our capitalists and manufacturers, intent only on filling their own pockets, refuse to pay their employees the wages that, by right, they ought to have, but frequently try to squeeze the very blood out of the poor, so to speak, thus driving them to dissatisfaction and bringing them to want. On the other hand, how-

ever, also this is often the case that the workingmen, although receiving all the wages they can reasonably expect, are still dissatisfied and demand more than their employers can afford to pay them. And hence all the strikes and lockouts that in late years have so disturbed our country, frequently assuming wide dimensions and ending in riot and bloodshed. What a blessing, therefore, would it be for our country, if the rule, that the laborer is worthy of his hire, were recognized both by employers and workmen.

This rule, that the laborer is worthy of his hire, which obtains in the kingdom of this world, does not apply in the kingdom of heaven. On the contrary, whatever we receive from God is not merited by us, but given us by grace. This important truth is illustrated by Christ in our Gospel, by the parable of the laborers in the vineyard. Let me, therefore, endeavor to impress upon you now,

THAT NOTHING BUT GRACE OBTAINS IN THE KINGDOM OF
HEAVEN.

This implies,

1. *That we are saved by grace alone, and*
2. *That he who would be saved in another way must be lost.*

1.

The occasion that led Christ to tell this parable of the laborers in the vineyard, as we see from the foregoing chapter, was the following: Peter put this question to Jesus: "Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed Thee; what shall we have therefor?" To this Jesus answered: "Verily, I say unto you . . . eternal life." Here, then, Christ plainly states that everything a Christian does and suffers for the Lord's sake shall be richly rewarded in heaven. That is to be the great comfort and consolation in our trials and afflictions here in this life of trouble and misery. But in order to ward off the false opinion as though by our works and suffering we could really merit heaven with its glory, Christ immediately proceeds: "But many that are first shall be last, and the last shall be first. For the kingdom of heaven," etc. And then He goes on to tell the parable contained in the text. Already from this we can plainly see what is the Lord's object in relating this parable. He wishes to show that in the kingdom of heaven God does not act according to the rule, that the laborer is worthy of his hire, that, therefore, we had a right to expect a reward proportionate to the work we perform for Him in His vineyard, that, on the contrary, God in His kingdom often makes the first last, and the last first, that He dispenses His gifts according to His pleasure, because they are only gifts of His grace.

The parable itself also shows plainly that this is the meaning our Lord intended to convey by it. We can already infer it from the way in which the householder hired the men to work. He went out to the market-place and found the men there. Thus God goes

out into the market-place of this world and there hires men to labor in His vineyard, in other words, calls men into His kingdom, the Church. Now God does not need our work; He is almighty and does not stand in need of our feeble efforts to help His work along. Already this, therefore, is grace, nothing but grace, that He calls men into His heavenly kingdom. Nor will He need us for His happiness in heaven. Nay, He is completely, absolutely happy in Himself, and does not need us to complete His bliss. He could be eternally happy and blissful without us. This already shows that it can be only grace that prompts Him to hire laborers for His vineyard, that prompts Him to call men into His kingdom here on earth with a view of taking them to heaven in the world to come.

Still more plainly Christ shows this at the end of the parable by the way in which the wages were paid to the workmen. When evening came on, the lord of the vineyard sent his steward with the order: "Call the laborers . . . the first." Accordingly, those who had only worked an hour were called first and received their penny, followed by those who had worked three hours, and so on, until those came who had worked all the day. Here we mark, first, that all the laborers, without reference to the time they had worked, received the same amount of wages, and we also note that those who had worked the shortest time received their wages first, and those who had worked the longest received theirs last. All of which goes to show that the lord of that vineyard did not recompense them according to their deserts, but according to his own pleasure. And that is the way God does in His kingdom. He does not dispense His gifts according to our merits, least of all does He give us heaven because we deserve it, but His gifts are gifts of grace; He deals with us according to His own good pleasure, and it is His mercy that induces Him to deal with us at all. God does not owe us anything. On the contrary, we owe everything to Him. He gives us a thousand times more than we could ever give to Him. We owe Him our very life and existence, and everything that we need to support this life we get from Him. Even of all the good things that we get from Him here on earth, we must therefore confess with Dr. Luther in the explanation of the First Article of our Creed, that He gives us "all this purely out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in us." Truly, then, if even these temporal benefits that God confers upon us are gifts of His grace, if even these we cannot merit by our works and holy life, then this is certainly much more the case with regard to heaven and its eternal joy and happiness. God in no way whatsoever owes heaven to us. On the contrary, if He would deal with us according to our deserts, He would cast us all away from Him into hell. That is where we belong; that is what we all deserve by our sins and iniquities. It is God's grace and mercy alone that prompts Him to

give us heaven. If He were not so gracious and merciful, if He were merely a just and holy God, none of us would get there.

That is the important truth that Christ wishes to inculcate by the parable of the laborers in the vineyard. This truth is also taught in other places of Scripture, and not only in a few, but in innumerable passages, I might say. Here is a very plain text that asserts this truth in the very terms I used: "By grace are ye saved . . . gift of God," Eph. 2, 8. Here Paul states in so many words that we are saved by grace, that our salvation is a gift, a free, voluntary gift of God. The same apostle writes to the Romans (3, 24): "All are justified" (and therefore saved) "freely . . . Christ Jesus." Here, again, the apostle states that our salvation is given freely, from pure grace. Again Paul writes to Titus (3, 5, 7): "Not by works of righteousness . . . He saved us, . . . that being justified . . . eternal life." Here again Paul expressly excludes all works and merit on our part and contends that we are justified and saved "according to the mercy" and "by the grace of God." And thus I might go on to multiply passages teaching in very words that we are saved by grace, that heaven is a gift of God's grace and mercy alone.

Again we also find a great number of passages, which, although not using the very words: "Man is saved by grace," yet teach this by direct inference. They are all those passages which tell us that man is saved through faith for the sake of Christ. For why would man need a Savior, if it were not because he could not save himself by his own works? Why is it that man can go to heaven only by faith in this Savior Jesus Christ, if it is not because he cannot go there on the strength of his own merit? And what was it that prompted God to send His Son into the world to become the Savior of sinful mankind, if not His grace and mercy that pitied man in his dreadful state? Yes, it was God's grace that provided a Savior for man, so that he who had deserved hell might escape its eternal torments and become eternally happy. He did not like to see men perish forever in their sins; He had compassion on them; and His compassion, or mercy, or grace, call it whatever you will, actuated Him in providing for them a means of escape and rescue. To say, therefore, that man is saved by faith, through Christ, is exactly the same as saying: Man is saved by grace. But where shall I begin to recount the passages that teach salvation and justification by faith in Christ? Let me only remind you of the few most important ones. Above all, Christ Himself says in that most beautiful verse of the whole Bible: "God so loved the world," etc. Here our Lord says that God's love moved Him to send His Son, so that by faith in His name we might be saved. The same thing Paul says (Rom. 5, 8): "God commendeth His love . . . died for us." God's love, then, moved Him to send His Son for our redemption. But what else is God's love than His grace and mercy? Again Paul writes in

the glorious 3d chapter of his Epistle to the Romans: "But now the righteousness of God . . . all them that believe." "Therefore we conclude . . . deeds of the Law." Here Paul testifies that by faith alone we can be justified and saved. And to say, "We are saved by faith," and, "We are saved by grace," is the same that he teaches ch. 4, 16, where he says: "Therefore it" (*i. e.*, salvation) "is of faith, that it might be by grace." From this it is evident, my dear hearers: when Scriptures teach that we are saved by faith in Christ, they teach, by inference, that our salvation is a gift of God's grace, in other words, that in the kingdom of heaven only grace obtains and not works.

O thank God, my hearers, that we have the pure doctrine of God's Word on this most important article of our Christian faith! Thank God that our dear Lutheran Church has always upheld the Bible doctrine of man's salvation by faith in Christ, without any merits or works on our part. I could multiply quotations, both from our confessions and from private writings of teachers of our church, which bear testimony to this doctrine. I will mention only a few. Thus our church confesses in the Formula of Concord (p. 630): "Concerning the righteousness of faith before God, we believe, teach, and confess unanimously . . . that poor sinful man is justified before God"—*i. e.*, absolved and declared free from all sins, and from the sentence of his well-deserved condemnation, and is adopted as a child and an heir of eternal life—"without any human merit or worthiness, and without any antecedent, present, or subsequent works, out of pure grace, for the sake of the merit, the perfect obedience, the bitter sufferings and death, and the resurrection of Christ, our Lord, alone." This is only one of the testimonies with which our confessions abound. Our Catechism says in regard to this point (Qu. 307, p. 128): "How, then, do you become just before God and obtain eternal salvation? Not by the merit of works, . . . but only through the grace and mercy of God, for the sake of the merit of Christ alone, which I have apprehended and appropriated by true confidence of the heart." These few may suffice. Oh, let me repeat it: Thank God that He has preserved to our church this doctrine, that we are saved by grace alone, without any merit on our part, that in the kingdom of heaven grace, and only grace, obtains. May God also help us to accept this doctrine in true faith. May He help us to cast away all trust and confidence in self and to rely solely upon His grace. For he that seeks to be saved in another way will surely be lost. It is this that I wish to speak of in the second place.

2.

After having proved that we are saved by grace alone, the second proposition is really self-evident, and I shall therefore dwell upon it only very briefly. We find this truth illustrated very plainly

in our parable. When the lord of the vineyard had sent his steward to pay the laborers, and when they had all received their penny, those who had been called first into the vineyard "murmured against the goodman . . . I am good?" The lord, then, urges these two things against those murmurers who believed they had not been justly dealt with: 1) that they had agreed with him for a penny a day, 2) that he had a right to give to those who had not worked as long as they just as much, if in his mercy and compassion he chose to do so. And finally he tells them: "Take that thine is, and go thy way," *i. e.*, you have received all that is due to you; and now leave me, I will have nothing more to do with such dissatisfied people!

This is typical of what God does in His kingdom. He sometimes has such customers to deal with as murmur against the manner in which He distributes His gifts, imagining that they are not justly dealt with, that God owes them something for their works and their holiness, that they have a right to demand heaven of Him as a recompense for what they did for Him. Such people are not few in number. But God says to them: "Take that thine is, and go thy way," *i. e.*, you have already received from me all that I owe you for your work in my kingdom, yea, a great deal more. Therefore go; you cannot expect any more from me. I do not owe you heaven for your works, and because you expected heaven as a recompense for your works, you cannot enter it. Depart from me into everlasting darkness! That is what you deserved by your sins.

That is what Christ means to say in the second place by our parable. And this, too, is clearly taught by other passages of Scripture. Our Lord, for instance, says in His parable of the Pharisee and the publican that the Pharisee who trusted in his own works and righteousness and foolishly imagined that he could be saved by it, was not justified, "for," He adds, as the reason for this, "every one that exalteth himself shall be abased" by God, *i. e.*, he that is not willing to be saved by grace, through faith in the merits of Christ, but wishes to enter heaven upon his own merits, will never get there, but will be lost. The same thing Paul testifies in his letter to the Galatians. The Christians at Galatia had been seduced by certain false teachers, who taught them that faith in Christ alone would not suffice to save them, but that for this purpose they must also be circumcised and keep other portions of the Law of Moses. But to these Christians, who had thus been beguiled to trust, partly at least, in their own merits alongside of the merits of Christ and the grace of God, Paul writes very earnestly (5, 2 ff.): "Behold, I, Paul, say unto you . . . fallen from grace." And the same thing he urges Rom. 11, 6: "And if by grace . . . no more work." It is plain teaching of Scripture, then, that grace and works exclude each other. Either you must be saved by works or by grace; you cannot be saved

by both, partly by the one and partly by the other. Oh, therefore cast away all trust in self, all trust in your own works and righteousness, and learn to trust alone in the mercy and grace of God. For that, as we heard, is the only way of salvation. He that would, partly or wholly, be saved by his own works must be inevitably lost.

G. L.

Sermon on Is. 1, 18—20.

IN CHRIST DEARLY BELOVED:—

Modern Bible critics would have us believe that the Bible, not being verbally inspired, as our fathers taught, not only contains many discrepancies and contradictions, but also fundamental differences of opinion, as to the substance of Christian doctrine, on the part of its various authors. Thus modernists speak of various types of doctrine in the New Testament. They enumerate as many as four such types of doctrine, accrediting one to St. James, who, they say, sees in Christianity nothing but the fulfillment of God's Law; another to St. Peter, who, they claim, looks upon Christianity as the fulfillment of the prophecies of the Old Testament, as accepted by the Jews at the time of Christ; another, each, to St. Paul and St. John, both of whom are said to accept a fundamental difference between the Old and New Testaments, St. Paul establishing this imagined difference, while St. John enjoys its full possession.

If one sifts these modern views down to their fundamental principle, the result will be an arbitrarily established difference between the two Testaments as to the chief doctrine of the Christian religion, the doctrine of justification. While modernists readily admit that some of the chief authors of the New Testament, St. Paul and St. John, teach a justification by grace, for Christ's sake, through faith, they yet maintain that the Old Testament knows of no such doctrine, but teaches, on the contrary, that justification must be brought about by man's own efforts. If this principle can be shown to be a fallacy, then the entire structure of various types of doctrines in the New Testament, reared upon it by modern Bible critics, will topple over. For surely, if the Old and the New Testament agree as to the foundation upon which man's salvation rests, *i. e.*, the doctrine of justification, then they must also fully agree as to the minor details, relatively speaking, of God's plan of salvation, and it is palpable nonsense to speak even of discrepancies, not to mention contradictions and fundamental differences in any part of the entire Bible.

How, then, about this principle? Does the Old Testament teach justification by works? Consult the prophets! Every promise of

the Messiah is an irrefutable Old Testament proof that man is justified by the grace of God who, in compassionate mercy for sinful mankind, gave to the world His Son, the Savior, the Redeemer. Examine the prototypes of the Mosaic law of ceremonies, imposed upon Israel for divine worship. They are active proof that man is justified through the vicarious merits of Him whose work they prefigure. View the lives of God's children in Old Testament times. With one accord they testify: "Alone through faith have we been justified in God's sight, and made heirs of salvation." Not only that. Aside from these irrefutable proofs, we have statements in the Old Testament which teach justification by grace, for Christ's sake, through faith, not less clearly than the words of St. Paul from Rom. 3, 28: "Therefore we conclude . . . of the Law." Such a statement we have before us this evening. The words are taken from Is. 1, 18—20. This text teaches:

1. *Man is justified by grace alone;*
2. *Man's justification is based upon the merits of the promised Messiah;*
3. *Man is made a recipient of justification by faith.*

1.

One need only read or hear the words of our text to be immediately convinced that they are spoken by the merciful and gracious God, full of compassionate love for poor fallen, sinful man. But to obtain an approximate idea of the unfathomable depth of the fountain of divine love here flowing forth we must call to our minds the connection in which the words of our text are spoken. The entire first chapter of Isaiah contains the record of a legal proceeding in which the holy and just God calls before His bar of justice His fallen people, the Jewish nation. In the first part the Lord appears as plaintiff, accusing His people of many transgressions of His Law, which culminated in the basest ingratitude toward their divine benefactor, calling upon heaven and earth as witnesses of Israel's crimes, vv. 2—4. Then He calls attention to His numerous efforts at correcting His people and calling them to repentance by inflicting upon them all kinds of temporal punishment. All these visitations, which, on God's part, were meant for Israel's eternal welfare, Israel abused by more and more hardening their hearts against God and His merciful intentions, vv. 5—7. But for a few faithful ones in Israel the entire nation is corrupt, so completely turned against the Lord as were the people of Sodom and Gomorrah in the time of Lot, vv. 8. 9. And then it seems Israel is making a half-hearted attempt at justification by pleading their sacrifices and divine services as a palliation of their guilt. God, however, shows that sacrifices and services offered Him, not in the spirit of a loving

child, but of a servant seeking reward, are an abomination to Him and surely not a palliation, but, rather, an aggravation, of guilt, vv. 11—15. Thus Israel stands in God's presence, convicted of many crimes, burdened with a load of sins, admitting their guilt in angry silence.

And now the scene is changed. God no longer appears as plaintiff against Israel, but as the Judge pronouncing judgment upon a culprit convicted, beyond the possibility of a doubt, of capital crimes. And what is the judgment in the case? What sentence does the Lord pass upon His fallen people, whose hands are polluted with blood? Hear it and be amazed, v. 18. Israel is polluted with crimes. Her sins are as crimson and scarlet, bloody and putrid. Yet God will not see those sins. In God's sight they shall be pure, white as the beautiful driven snow, blinding in its purity, radiating forth, as cleansed white wool, splendor and beauty in virtue and perfect holiness and righteousness. *That* sentence, *that* judgment, surpasses all understanding; it cannot be comprehended by any created mind, neither of man nor angel. Surely: "God justifieth the ungodly." And this judgment of God is pronounced, while the sinner is not yet willing to accept it, has not even expressed a desire for the grace it offers. Grace and forgiveness have been prepared for the sinner while he is yet in his sins, an enemy of God, full of iniquity, an abomination in God's sight. Surely, Isaiah teaches the same general justification, taught by St. Paul and the other New Testament writers, who proclaim: God in Christ "reconciled the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them." All sinners, those not excepted whose sins are as crimson and scarlet, may become joyful partakers of God's wonderful grace and mercy, "that mercy never ending," etc. (Hymn 217, 2.)

2.

But how is God's wonderful judgment possible? On what, according to Isaiah, is it based? According to the writers of the New Testament God bases His gracious judgment upon the vicarious, atoning merits of Christ. And Isaiah fully agrees with them. God's sentence justifying the sinner is based on the atoning sacrifice of the promised Messiah. 'Tis true, Isaiah does not in our text mention the name of Messiah, but his words contain an unmistakable reference to the work, the vicarious sufferings, of Christ.

In the first place, let us note that Isaiah clearly teaches that God's wrath must be fully appeased, if man is to be justified. The earnest, fearful words of accusation in the first part of the chapter, spoken by the holy, just God against His sinful people, cannot but mean that in spite of His grace and mercy God is yet the "mighty and jealous God" who will not detract from His curse against the sinner: "Thou shalt surely die."

Note also the description of sin given in our text. They are "as scarlet" and "red like crimson." God looks upon every transgression of His Law as we look upon the shedding of human blood. Every sin is, in His sight, a capital crime, demanding for atonement a bloody sacrifice. A sinner cannot become justified before God unless his guilt be washed away by the blood of a perfect sacrifice. The words "scarlet" and "red like crimson" clearly demonstrate that. Virtually the same statement is made in v. 27: "Zion shall be redeemed," etc. If Zion is to be redeemed, the judgment of God's Law, "Thou shalt surely die!" must be carried out; if Zion's converts are to be freed at all, then a righteousness must be prepared for them, a righteousness which is valid before God. Whose blood is to be shed as a ransom for the sinner's guilt, whose righteousness is to procure for the transgressor of God's Law freedom from sin, Isaiah does not state in our text. But other passages of his book clearly do show the Savior of mankind. In ch. 9 he says of the Christ-child, "whose name is Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace," that He is to "establish His kingdom with judgment and justice." The promised Messiah is to carry out upon Himself the judgment of the Law, of God, procuring justice, or righteousness, absolute and perfect, for all, accepting as His subjects all those, and those only, to whom His righteousness is imputed. Still more clearly, if possible, this is set forth in ch. 53, 4. 5: "Surely He" (the Messiah) "hath borne . . . we are healed."

Thus here also the Old and the New Testament fully agree. Isaiah, Paul, John, and Peter are in full accord with one another: "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself." "The blood of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, cleanseth us from all sin." "Ye are redeemed with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot." Our songs of rejoicing have good cause: "O depth of love in which past finding," etc. (Hymn 217, 4.)

3.

Now, how are we made partakers of God's grace, founded on the Savior's merits? According to St. Paul and the entire New Testament justification is imputed to us through faith. Justification has been prepared for all, and placed for all, as a precious gift of God, in the Gospel and the sacraments. Nothing remains to be done for the sinner; he need only take it, only believe, only declare his willingness to accept it. "Just as I am, without one plea," etc. (Hymn 214, 1.) "Nothing in my hands I bring; simply to Thy cross I cling."

When a sinner makes this declaration, he has forgiveness, he is justified. That is also Isaiah's position. "If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land." If ye be willing and obedient, ye may be assured of God's good will in time and eternity.

Justification and forgiveness shall then be your precious possession. "Obedient" — does not this word seem to imply that God here makes a demand, conditioning forgiveness and justification upon the sinner's fulfillment of this demand? If this word be considered separate from the connection in which it is here used, then, indeed, it might seem so. But its connection in our text precludes such a supposition. Our text clearly teaches that God's grace alone prompts Him to forgive sins. That being the case, justification cannot be conditioned upon any effort on the part of the sinner. The word "obedient" has an antecedent in our text explaining it: "If ye be *willing* and obedient." "Willing" for what? Why, willing to abide by God's decision given in v. 18. God has pronounced the sinner just in v. 18. All that remains for the sinner is to be willing to accept forgiveness and justification, to be obedient and bow to God's absolving judgment. The contrast in v. 20 makes this still more clear: "If ye refuse and rebel," etc. Those only remain under God's wrath and curse who refuse to accept what the mouth of the Lord has spoken, who rebel in unbelief against the Lord's merciful judgment: "Though your sins be as scarlet," etc.

Thus here again the Old and the New Testament fully agree. If a sinner would be justified, he need only stretch out his hand of faith and accept forgiveness, absolution, justification, which God offers in His means of grace as a free gift, without any compensation on the sinner's part. Nor is the term "obedience" for faith foreign to the New Testament. We meet with it again and again in various New Testament books. To mention but one passage, Rom. 16, 26 Paul says that the divine mystery of the Gospel was made manifest and known to all nations "for the obedience of faith."

There is but one way of salvation, and that way is revealed both in the Old and the New Testament. It is the way of grace safely founded on the merits of Christ, the Savior of the world. Only with the feet of faith can we walk on this way. Let us ever abide by it. If Satan would seduce us to trust to man's works, be they our own or those of some saint long dead, let us remember that, according to God's and our conscience's verdict, the way of human works leads over boggy marshes, which finally will engulf the poor lost wanderer in death and despair. If he would force us upon the stony path of despair, which ends in the abyss of hell, let us remember that there is forgiveness for all, those not excluded whose sins are "as scarlet" and "red like crimson." Under all conditions, at all times, let us cling steadfastly to Jesus, the Champion of our salvation, trusting in faith in nothing but His perfect, all-sufficient merits. Until the last moment, the moment of death, let us remain true to our faithful vow: "On this foundation I unshrinking," etc. (Hymn 217, 10.)

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